

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
GAELIC COMMITTEE – 21 MAY 2009

Agenda Item	2.
Report No	G/13/09

GAELIC INITIATIVES

Report by Director of Education, Culture and Sport Service

Summary

Gaelic Language Initiatives are on the point of being rolled out to several areas within Scotland, including three within the Highland Council area.

They are built on the successful Welsh “Menter Iaith” model where community enterprises have been established over the last 20 years and where they have played a significant role in the local revival of the Welsh language

Comunn na Gàidhlig is the body overseeing the introduction of the Initiatives in Scotland and their Chief Executive, Archie MacLean, will make a presentation to the Committee on the concept and the initial responses to the Lochaber Initiative which has begun to be rolled out.

1. Background

- 1.1 The first Menter Iaith “Welsh Language Initiative” was established in Wales in 1991. There are now 21 throughout the country. The business model sees the establishment of a community enterprise or company working towards the delivery of language development priorities identified by community members themselves, supported by development staff and working in partnership with other local organisations.
- 1.2 Amongst the key principles are that community representatives themselves take leading roles on the boards of the individual companies, rather than members and officers of other companies. Within an overall framework of a national language plan they are then able to identify which issues they feel most important in their own areas.
- 1.3 The Welsh Menter Iaith have received public financial support through their establishment, but are also encouraged to become self-sustaining to different degrees, depending on their own local circumstances, with slightly different approaches being taken in more populated, urban areas such as south Wales, and more rural areas in west and north Wales.
- 1.4 The types of activities which are undertaken by individual Mentrau to generate income can vary, but can include: the provision of translation services; the provision of Welsh learning activities; running childcare/play schemes etc. They also provide advice and guidance to communities, local businesses and

organisations on issues related to Welsh language development such as bilingualism, language usage and policies, Welsh medium education and so on.

- 1.5 The success of these initiatives has led to plans to introduce them to Scotland in the hope that some of the benefits and achievements can be replicated here. Bòrd na Gàidhlig has asked Comunn na Gàidhlig to oversee the roll-out of the initiatives in Scotland, with eight potential areas being identified initially. These are: the west side of Lewis; South Uist and Eriskay; Barra and Vatersay; Glasgow; Edinburgh, and in the Highland Council area: Lochaber; north Skye; and north west Sutherland and Assynt.
- 1.6 An initial meeting to launch the Initiatives has been held in Lochaber, where local consultation is now underway to seek the community's views on Gaelic development priorities in the area, and to try and identify people interested in taking part in the initial steering group.
- 1.7 The Language Initiatives in Scotland, if they mirror the success achieved in Wales, have the potential to be significantly important. They could be valuable partners to the Council in terms of future implementation of its Gaelic Language Plan, perhaps by undertaking some elements of local delivery where the Council does not have sufficient staff of its own.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this brief background report, and the presentation to be given by Archie MacLean, the Chief Executive of Comunn na Gàidhlig.
- 2.2 Thereafter Members are invited to comment on the plans to introduce Language Initiatives to Scotland and the Highlands, and to approve Council Officers working alongside Comunn na Gàidhlig and the local steering groups to take the proposals forward.

Signature:

Designation: Director, Education, Culture and Sport Service

Date: 11 May 2009

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Ref: HF/AC

Background Papers: